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ABSTRACT

Described in this paper is the educational background and schooling experienced by Haitian immigrant children who are presently enrolled in the New York school system. Different types of schools in Haiti (urban, rural, private, public, elementary and secondary), and the functions of these schools in Haitian society are examined. Other topics discussed include the school community, competition for school admission, the classroom context, the learning process, teacher-student relationships, parent-student relationships, parent-teacher relationships and the Haitian perception of schooling. Factors considered include school structure, teacher qualifications, entrance exams, discipline, home environment, and the use of French at all levels of instruction. (EB)

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Schooling in Haiti

Michel S. Laguerre

Caribbean emigration to the United States has resulted in the development of distinct West Indian immigrant communities in major American cities such as New York, Miami, Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. These communities form cultural enclaves within which migrants are able to maintain and perpetuate some of their cultural heritage while they are being acculturated to mainstream American culture. Part of their acculturation and integration in American society is accomplished through participation in the American school system. The migrants are likely to have had some school experience in their homeland and to retain acquired learning habits when they move into American schools. The passage of students from a Caribbean educational system to the American school system requires adaptation to meet new challenges. This adaptation may determine scholastic failure or success. The teachers with whom the children interact in a classroom setting are strategic persons who must be able to help the children adapt to a new system. To do this most effectively, teachers should familiarize themselves with the school experience of their immigrant students.

This essay proposes to shed light on the schooling experience of Haitian immigrant children who are presently enrolled in the New York school system. Haitians are the most recent group of West Indian immigrants to settle in large numbers in New York. The majority of them came here during the administration of François ("Papa Doc") Duvalier who, from 1957 to 1971, ruled the Republic of Haiti with an iron fist. Presently, there are approximately 350,000 Haitian immigrants living in New York City alone. Despite their meager financial resources, they are a proud people who make great sacrifices to send their children to American schools. Various problems faced by these students in American schools, although of utmost importance for their adaptation in American society, have not yet been studied.[1] The aim of this paper, however, is not to discuss the adaptation of Haitian children to the American school system, but rather to present an ethnography of their Haitian schooling experience so as to provide teachers with a broad picture of the cultural background of their Haitian immigrant students.

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Research Strategy and Methodology

The data upon which this essay is based was gathered from July 1977 to August 1978, while I was doing fieldwork in New York among Haitian immigrants. About twenty people were selected for formal interviews and in the course of the research I had the opportunity to conduct informal interviews with a number of others. The group of twenty was composed of five couples with elementary and high school age children, five female and five male students. Eight of the students were attending high school in Brooklyn and the other two were in college. The five couples included four individuals who had previously taught at the elementary and secondary school levels in Haiti.

The migrants interviewed had been in New York from one to five years. They all had attended school in Haiti and some of them still had children attending schools both in New York and in Haiti. Because their experience with Haitian schools as former students and/or as parents had been relatively recent, they could provide me with pertinent information about schooling in Haiti. There has not been any major change in the Haitian educational system since they left.

The aim of these interviews was to collect life histories of individuals, giving emphasis to their schooling experience in Haiti and the differences they saw between the Haitian and the American educational systems. In many instances, the views expressed by the migrants corresponded to my own observations regarding my schooling experience in Haiti as well as to the views often voiced by members of the New York-based "Haitian Bilingual Education Association."

The Organization of Primary Schools

The schooling experience of Haitian students varies with the kind of school attended. (cf. Table 1: Primary Schools) There are several ways of acquiring formal elementary education in Haiti. In general, urban schools are better equipped than rural schools. Not all the schools provide their students the opportunity to complete the Elementary School Cycle. Some are "stepping stones" in that they prepare students for subsequent entry to better organized public or private schools. A description of the functioning of these various types of schools may shed light on their role in Haitian society and the schooling experience of their students. For that purpose, the following types of schools will be examined: 1) *Ecoles Maternalles* (Kindergartens), 2) *Ecoles Elémentaires Privées et Publiques* (Private and Public Elementary Schools), 3) *Fermes Ecoles* (Farm Schools), 4) *Ecoles Presbytérales* (Presbyterial Schools) and 5) *Bay Leson* (Home Schools, Tutorials).

Table 1:

Primary Schools

Year	*Number of Students*	*Number of Teachers*	*Number of Schools*
1959-60	238,504	5,365	1,522
1960-61	248,750	5,533	1,793
1961-62	260,792	5,793	1,616
1962-63	309,670	5,903	1,628
1963-64	362,374	6,260	1,683
1964-65	380,069	6,198	1,947
1965-66	283,779*	6,210	1,949
1966-67	255,152	6,460	1,955
1967-68	298,861	6,741	1,968

Compiled by Michel S. Laguerre from *Institut Haitien de Statistiques, Guide Economique de la République d'Haiti* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de l'Etat, 1971), pp. 77-78.

*After 1964-65, due to a change in the political situation, many urban parents sent their children to study outside the country. This accounts for the drop in the number of students.

The number of years that comprises the Elementary School Cycle and the courses to be taught are defined by the *Département de l'Education Nationale* (Ministry of National Education) for the urban schools and by the *Département de l'Agriculture* (Ministry of Agriculture) for rural schools. At the elementary school level teachers focus exclusively on primary teaching.

> By primary teaching, we mean the program of studies which leads to the level of *Certificat d'Etudes Primaires*. One who obtains this Certificate has the basic background in arithmetic, language, and elementary sciences which will permit him either to continue developing his intellectual resources or to resolve everyday problems. This course ordinarily extends over a period of six or seven years and a student of average intelligence who begins his studies at six will finish them at the age of twelve.
>
> As far as basic knowledge is concerned, the program of rural education is generally the same as that of urban education, except that it is much more practical. As a rule, the students at the rural schools learn by doing. Handicrafts and practical courses in agriculture illustrate and strengthen the knowledge acquired in class.[2]

Ecoles Maternelles (kindergartens) take youngsters for a one-year cycle. They are enrolled in such schools at the age of five and the following year they are eligible to enter the Elementary School Cycle. During their kindergarten year, children learn names and colors of objects, the alphabet, numbers, and how to copy short sentences. They also spend much of their time playing games with other children.

In 1977, there were 119 Ecoles Maternelles in Haiti and 108 of them were located in Port au Prince, the major city of Haiti.[3] Many of the teachers engaged in preparing youngsters for elementary schools are themselves not prepared for this kind of work. Often they do not have any formal training for such a job but are willing to to it because they could not secure a better job elsewhere.

Haitian kindergartens are very poorly equipped. For example, even when a school has a few games and dolls, these materials are stored and the youngsters have no access to them. They may be allowed to look at the dolls, but they are not permitted to touch them, because the school may not have the financial resources to replace damaged toys and equipment.

Only the local elite and Haitian migrants living in the United States or Canada are able to send their children to kindergarten in Haiti. They do so in order to secure places in the best elementary schools, since children who have attended kindergarten have a marked advantage over those who have not. They are able to recognize numbers and letters of the alphabet. Also, they understand the meaning of simple French sentences which makes it easier for them to understand teachers when they attend elementary schools.

Ecoles Nationales de Garçons ou de Filles (public schools for boys or girls) are run by the State and are widespread in Haiti. There is one in almost every single village and city. Haitian public elementary schools are usually segregated by sex. Boys and girls have separate school buildings and are served by different teaching staffs. Elementary school students pass through the following steps:

Grade		*Average Age*
First	Enfantine (Beginners' Courses)	6
Second	Cours Préparatoires I (Preparatory Courses I)	7
Third	Cours Préparatoires II (Preparatory Courses II)	8
Fourth	Cours Elémentaires I (Elementary Courses I)	9
Fifth	Cours Elémentaires II (Elementary Courses II)	10
Sixth	Cours Moyens I (Intermediate Courses I)	11
Seventh	Cours Moyens II (Intermediate Courses II)	12

Youngsters who attended Ecoles Maternelles prior to their enrollment in the elementary school start with Preparatory Courses I. All other newcomers usually start with the Beginners' Courses. Depending on their age and their reading and writing ability, youngsters may spend one to two years attending the Beginners' Courses until they are ready to pass to Preparatory Courses I.

An average public elementary school has four teachers; this means that the majority of teachers (three out of four) must teach two classes. The director and principal of the school is also a teacher. In addition to serving as administrator, he teaches students at the Intermediate Courses II level, preparing them for the Certificat d'Etudes Primaires (Certificate of Primary Studies).

Ecoles Publiques Congréganistes (Catholic public schools) are run by the Catholic Church and are subsidized by the State. In such schools, students are not required to pay tuition and fees. These schools are for boys when the staff is comprised of brothers (i.e. members of a male religious order) or for girls when the staff is mostly Catholic nuns.

In general, the *Ecoles Publiques Congréganistes* have a good reputation. Unlike the other public schools they are not understaffed, since the religious orders provide teachers and the necessary funds to keep them functioning well. Students attending such schools are known to be very disciplined and score well in the qualifying examinations for the Certificate of Primary Studies. After guiding their students through the elementary school system, the brothers and nuns are able to place these students in secondary schools operated by their own orders in Port-au-Prince. Usually a letter of recommendation from a brother or a nun is a guarantee of admission to any of the best secondary schools in Port-au-Prince. Because the religious orders see evangelization as part of their mission, the curriculum in an *Ecole Publique Congréganiste* includes religious education. This results in a heavier teaching load

for the brothers and nuns in such schools.

Ecoles Privées (private schools), unless they are run by a religious order, are usually open to both boys and girls. In many of the private schools, the level of education of the teachers leaves much to be desired. Some do not even have the Certificate of Primary Studies which is awarded to anyone who successfully passes the State Examinations after completion of the Elementary School Cycle.

There are also a variety of private schools run by amateur teachers. Several young men and women who were unable to get teaching jobs in the established elementary schools have opened their own schools. The best elementary schools are those run by the Catholic and Protestant missionaries and the private schools that have survived over the years. They have firmly established reputations and the public records attest to the continual success of their students in the qualifying examinations for the Certificate of Primary Studies.

Fermes Ecoles (farm schools) are established in rural districts to provide educational facilities to young peasants and to teach them the basics of agriculture. Because of the lack of qualified teachers and equipment, rural students learn very little in these schools. Student absenteeism is high during the rainy season and the period of harvest when many of the youngsters are needed at home to help their parents in the fields. The salary for rural teachers is lower than that provided to urban teachers and there has been a continual trend for qualified teachers to migrate to villages and cities where they can get better pay. Consequently, the level of instruction in rural schools is so low that to date very few students have been able to get the Certificate of Primary Studies. Those who have managed to obtain it had to transfer somehow to a village school to complete Intermediate Courses I and II.

Ecoles Presbytérales (presbyterial schools) are rural public schools run by the Catholic Church. To ease its work of evangelization, the Catholic Church has an *Ecole Presbytérale* attached to most of its rural churches. Such schools are generally run by one person, most often the rural catechist whose job it is to teach basic reading, writing, and arithmetic as well as catechism to his students. The teacher usually does not hold a Certificate of Primary Studies and students who attend such schools do not expect to obtain a Certificate at the end of the cycle. They can get it only if their parents can afford to send them to the neighboring village school.

Presbyterial schools do not have a school building separated from the church. The children meet in the local church with their teachers once a day, either around noon or later in the day after the teacher has worked in his field and the students in the fields of their parents. Each day the teacher decides when they are going to meet the next day. There is no set schedule and no fixed program to be covered each year. Everything is done according to the will and the mood of the teacher-catechist, who gets $5.00 a month for his salary, plus whatever occasional gifts he may receive from the parents of his students.

The *Bay Leson* (home school) is the most widespread type of schooling in Haiti. In essence, it is the phenomenon whereby a tutor receives students in his or her own home. There are three types of *Bay Leson*. In the first type, a tutor may give summer classes for regular school students who failed their exams. The tutor is asked to prepare these youngsters for the September exams. Most often, the students have failed one or two subjects and the intensive summer training is intended to help them overcome their problems and pass to another grade. There may be, in addition, summer students who have not failed, but whose parents want them to accelerate. In either case, parents are very selective in the choice of tutors, for the scholastic success of the child may depend on the experience of the tutor.

The second type of tutor works with all kinds of students during the year. His job is to help them so that they can join a normal school. It sometimes happens that, in the middle of a school year, parents are unable to pay regular tuition and fees for their children. In such cases, they send them to tutors because it is less expensive and the children do not lose an entire year of schooling.

The third type of tutor can be either a regular teacher or someone who has no training in teaching at all, but who wants to make some extra money. He may convert any room in his house to a classroom by furnishing it with a blackboard. Students are expected to provide their own chairs and blackboard chalk. The *Bay Leson* is one of the most flourishing "businesses" in Haiti today.

The Organization of Secondary Schools

The Secondary School Program has a cycle covering seven years. (cf. Table 2: Secondary Schools) During the first six years students have the option of choosing one of the following sections: A (Humanities), B (Humanities and Sciences), and C (Sciences). Toward the end of the sixth year, students are eligible to take the State Exams for the *Baccalauréat 1ère Partie*. If they succeed, the following year they will be eligible to take another State Exam for the *Baccalauréat 2ème Partie*. Any student who wishes to apply for admission to the State University of Haiti needs to have this *Baccalauréat 2ème Partie*. The Secondary School Program was clearly described by Cook:

> The course of study for Secondary Schools covers seven years. Pupils are admitted to the Sixième (sixth grade) after having obtained the Certificate of Primary Studies and after passing an entrance examination. As in France, successive classes are numbered in counter-clockwise fashion. For example, the second year is called *Cinquième* (Fifth grade); the third year, *Quatrième;* the fourth year, *Troisième* (Third); the fifth year, *Seconde* (Second); the sixth year, *Première* or *Rhétorique;* and the final year is known as *Philosophie*. The three beginning classes, *Sixième, Cinquième* and *Quatrième*, constitute the Grammar Division, while the last four years are referred to as the Humanities Division.
>
> Secondary School students have a choice between three programs or sections: Section A (Latin-Greek), Section B (Latin-Science), and Section C (Science-Modern Languages). Section B, however, is offered only in a few private schools. Lycée students may thus select either Section A or Section C, but after the Grammar Division, the student who has shown a disposition for Latin and Greek will be compelled to change to Section C, after his parents or guardian have been notified, provided the Lycée he is attending offers the latter Course.
>
> A student in Section C may be admitted to Section A, after the grammar classes, on condition that he pass a special examination in Greek and Latin. After the *Troisième* no pupil may change from one section to another. The same regulations stipulate that the maximum number of students in any class is fixed at 35. Unfortunately this rule cannot always be applied. . . . The maximum age limit for students of the National Secondary School is set as follows: *Sixième*, 14 years; *Cinquième*, 15; *Quatrième*, 16; *Troisième*, 17; *Seconde*, 18; *Rhétorique*, 19 and *Philosophie*, 20.[4]

Table 2:

Secondary Schools

Year	*Number of Students*	*Number of Teachers*	*Number of Schools*
1959-60	18,779	1,651	103
1960-61	21,895	1,708	108
1961-62	21,345	1,607	108
1962-63	22,907	1,586	108
1963-64	23,833	1,462	105
1964-65	25,114	1,619	105
1965-66	26,172	1,681	105
1966-67	27,173	1,727	105
1967-68	29,195	1,724	105

Compiled by Michel S. Laguerre from *Institut Haitien de Statistiques, Guide Economique de la République d'Haiti* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de l'Etat, 1971), pp. 77-78.

The Lycées are public secondary schools for either boys or girls. The oldest ones such as *Lycée Petion* (boys), *Lycée Toussaint* (boys) and *Lycée des Jeunes Filles* (Girls) are segregated by sex. *Lycée* students are required to wear specific types of clothing *(uniforme)* and, when walking in the streets of Port-au-Prince, it is easy to recognize which *Lycée* a student attends.

The urban *Lycées* are always overcrowded. Rural students who do not have such schools in their villages migrate to Port-au-Prince to attend *Lycées* in that city. Classes are so crowded that students often must sit on windows and doorsteps. The situation is particularly alarming for the classes of *Rhétorique* and *Philosophie*, because repeaters keep coming back every year to prepare for their baccalaureat exams.

Most of the *Lycée* teachers are trained at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (Teachers College) or hold a degree from either a French university or from the State University of Haiti. They are hard-working people who must often hold jobs in more than one school to make ends meet.

The *Collèges* and *Ecoles Congréganistes* are private secondary schools for boys and girls. Some are run by Catholic or Protestant missionaries, and others by lay people. The *Ecoles Congréganistes* are staffed by priests, brothers, or nuns. They are the best secondary schools in terms of educational facilities, teacher training, student discipline, and student success in the State-administered exams.

The *Collèges* are most often run by lay people. These teachers have a teaching load heavier than that of their colleagues in the *Ecoles Congréganistes*, because the *Collèges* are more flexible in their admission and hiring policies. For example, students who were refused admission to the *Ecoles Congréganistes* may be accepted into the *Collèges*. These schools hire individuals without a university degree or a diploma from the *Ecole Normale* to teach the classes of *Sixième, Cinquième,* and *Quatrième*. In many instances, persons who failed the baccalaureat exams and were unable to enter the State University of Haiti have chosen secondary school teaching as a career.

Secondary school students attending the *Ecoles Congréganistes*, the *Collèges*, or the *Lycées* are better prepared in the humanities than in sciences, because the teachers themselves are better prepared to teach the humanities. Insufficient laboratories for physics and chemistry experiments also account for this generalized problem in secondary school education. As Dale puts it:

> The limitations of the secondary school problem are reflected in the preparation year required at the University of Haiti College of Engineering, and the College of Medicine, this preparatory year being designed to complete the entering student's preparation in mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology to enable him to qualify for admission to classes at the University level.[5]

The School Community

Schools are in session weekdays between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Morning classes last from 8:00 to 11:30 and afternoon classes from 2:00 to 4:00. Students are expected to be in school by 1:00 p.m. From 1:00 to 2:00 they are supposed to be in the classroom studying for the afternoon classes. This is a very noisy hour, with students repeating aloud sentences that they are trying to memorize. During the rainy season, but specifically from mid-March to the end of June, classes are from 8:00 to 12:00 noon and there is no afternoon class.

The average village elementary school consists of a director or principal who is also a teacher, three additional teachers, a superintendent, and the student body. Teachers are selected either by the Department of National Education or the Department of Agriculture, not by the local school director. The local school has little say in the hiring of its teachers. The department of National Education and the Department of Agriculture make all major decisions concerning the internal functioning of the local school. Therefore, teachers are not formally involved in discussing school policy. Rather, the director sends a quarterly report to the Port-au-Prince office that has jurisdiction over his school.

At the secondary school level, teachers are expected to teach specific courses. This makes their teaching schedule more flexible than that of their elementary school colleagues. To earn extra money, they often repeat the same courses in other secondary schools.

The number of teachers who have had formal training in one of the teachers colleges is low in comparison with the number of those who have not. This situation is particularly evident in rural schools. Both in and outside Port-au-Prince, few elementary school teachers have the *Baccalauréat 2ème Partie* diploma.

Professional teachers are to be found in city schools more than in rural schools. They migrate to Port-au-Prince and leave the rural schools to less prepared teachers. Secondary schools provide employment to graduates of the State University of Haiti, especially to those who have degrees in agronomy, law, or ethnology, and who are unable to find a good job elsewhere. Even professionals who have permanent jobs work as part-time teachers in the Port-au-Prince schools to make ends meet.

There is a tendency for people with some formal education to become teachers because schools are one of the most prosperous industries in Haiti. They provide jobs which are considered to be more or less prestigious and have been used as stepping stones by those looking for a permanent position. Civil servants who lose their jobs every time a new government takes office usually become schoolteachers or open their own schools.

While the *Ecoles Congréganistes* have well-prepared teachers who have been recruited on the basis of their competence as well as their religious beliefs, some private and most of the public schools are staffed by teachers who do not have the Certificate of Secondary Education. Nepo-

tism is common in private schools. The director, being the sole owner of the institution, may recruit his teachers from among relatives, friends, and the friends of his friends. Competence is not always the criterion used to select new teachers. In the public schools, teachers are placed by politicians whom they have supported. When the politicians lose their jobs, these teachers also lose theirs. However, lack of formal training does not mean a lack of dedication on the part of the teachers. In general, Haitian teachers take good care of their students, help them, and motivate them to do well in school. This is especially true in the case of those teachers who have political ambitions.

The monthly salary of a teacher in 1977 was between $40.00 and $80.00 Anyone living in Port-au-Prince and supporting a family must teach in more than one school or find another job. Salary has been a contributing factor in the migration of large numbers of well trained teachers to New York.

Competition For School Admission

Any pupil of school age can be admitted to the public school of his village. This is because, by law, children between the ages of seven and fourteen are obliged to attend school. However, admission to a private *Ecole Congréganiste* is the result of careful screening which takes into account parental economic status and religious beliefs. For example, only children whose parents are Catholic are admitted to such schools. In addition to meeting the religious requirement, parents must be able to pay tuition and fees for their children.

Admission to a public secondary school *(Lycée)* or an *Ecole Secondaire Congréganiste* in Port-au-Prince requires good connections. One may have to request the help of an influential family or politician to get one's daughter or son into a public school. A letter of recommendation from a local priest, brother or nun is often necessary for admission to an *Ecole Secondaire Congréganiste.*

Most elementary school children remain in their own home villages to attend schools there. The lack of sufficient secondary schools in the countryside is a cause for emigration of students to Port-au-Prince. After obtaining the *Certificat d'Etudes Primaires*, middle-class children are sent to Port-au-Prince for secondary schooling. The students are placed with relatives and friends and the parents send in food once a week. They may agree to pay a lump sum per quarter for their children. This situation is often embarrassing for the children, expecially when the parents are unable to send the weekly food ration, or pay the school fees, or buy their children decent clothing. Some students may stay on to pursue their studies despite such problems. Others give up without necessarily returning to the countryside.

The passage from elementary school to secondary school is marked by an educational event, the awarding of the *Certificat d'Etudes Primaires.* In order to obtain the Certificate, one must take the State exams. Few secondary schools accept students who have failed the State exams. However, it sometimes happens that they accept students who plan to migrate to North America or who intend to go to a vocational school. In either case, these students do not expect to remain in secondary school until they get their *Baccalauréat.* The *Certificat d'Etudes Primaires* is required for admission to the *Baccalauréat 1ère Partie* Exams. According to the State, this is one way of eliminating unprepared candidates from the *Baccalauréat* Exams. (cf. Table 3: Results of the Certificate of Primary Studies Exams).

Table 3:

Results of the Certificate of Primary Studies Exams

Year	*Number of students who took the exams*	*Those who passed the exams*	*Percentage*
1959-60	4,503	3,461	.76
1960-61	5,080	3,096	.60
1961-62	6,877	5,259	.76
1962-63	8,285	6,528	.78
1963-64	9,039	6,822	.75
1964-65	9,467	6,007	.63
1965-66	10,774	8,049	.74
1966-67	11,192	8,288	.74
1967-68	11,610	8,527	.73

Compiled by Michael S. Laguerre from *Institut Haitien de Statistiques, Guide Economique de la République d'Haiti* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de l'Etat, 1971), p. 89.

The *Certificat d'Etudes Primaires* exams are a way of testing the general knowledge of students to see if they can pursue secondary education. The Certificate is not, however, a guarantee of admission to a secondary school program, since each secondary school administers its own entrance examination. The Certificate exams test students on their elementary knowledge of natural sciences, world and Haitian history, geography, arithmetic, and French.

The Certificate test is *not* administered in every city, village and rural district where there are elementary schools, but only in major cities. Students who attend schools in satellite communities must spend at least three days in those cities to take the exams. At times this is a problem for parents, who must either accompany their children or find boarding facilities for them.

After passing the Certificate exams, a student must successfully complete the Secondary School Cycle before he/she can go on to college. The Secondary School Cycle ends with two important state exams: the *Baccalauréat 1ère Partie* and the *Baccalauréat 2ème Partie* Exams. The test for the *Baccalauréat 1ère Partie* is comprised of three sets of questions designed to meet the requirements of students enrolled in Sections A, B and C. The section A questions concentrate on humanities with minor emphasis on physics, chemistry, geometry, and calculus. For example, in this category, students are requested to translate a few paragraphs of Latin, Greek, and English into French. Questions on Haitian history and Haitian and French literature are given more weight than those on physics and chemistry. The section B exams present a balance of questions dealing with both science and the humanities. Section C exams focus on science and modern languages such as Spanish and English rather than on the social sciences. (cf. Table 4: Results of the *Baccalauréat 1ère Partie* Exams).

For the *Baccalauréat 2ème Partie* Exams, there are two sections: A and C. Section A places an emphasis on philosophy and letters while section C places its emphasis on the sciences and philosophy. Students who enrolled in Section B at the start of high school must, after obtaining the *Baccalauréat 1ère Partie* opt to join either Section A or Section C depending on what they want to do after graduation. (cf. Table 5: Results of the Baccalauréat 2ème Partie Exams).

Table 4:

Results of the Baccalauréat 1ère Partie Exams

Year	*Number of students who took the exams*	*Those who passed the exams*	*Percentage*
1959-60	1,849	698	.37
1960-61	1,934	764	.39
1961-62	2,228	851	.38
1962-63	2,570	938	.36
1963-64	2,421	333	.13
1964-65	2,560	999	.39
1965-66	2,511	263	.10
1966-67	2,742	786	.28
1967-68	4,350	927	.21

Compiled by Michel S. Laguerre from *Institut Haitien de Statistiques, Guide Economique de la République d'Haiti* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de l'Etat, 1971), p. 90.

Table 5:

Results of the Baccalauréat 2ème Partie Exams

Year	*Number of students who took the exams*	*Those who passed the exams*	*Percentage*
1959-60	534	457	.85
1960-61	705	539	.76
1961-62	856	303	.35
1962-63	955	756	.79
1963-64	975	401	.41
1964-65	611	381	.62
1965-66	611	440	.72
1966-67	625	532	.85
1967-68	945	676	.71

Compiled by Michel S. Laguerre from *Institut Haitien de Statistiques, Guide Economique de la République d'Haiti* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de l'Etat, 1971), p. 90.

The Classroom Context

Students are expected to arrive at school before 8 a.m. at which time they gather in front of the flag. The principal asks for silence, starts the Lord's Prayer, and the students continue reciting it. After singing the national anthem, students go to their respective classrooms.

A teacher will usually start class with an oral recitation of material students have memorized the previous night. The teacher asks a question and if the student cannot answer it, the teacher will ask the same question of another student. At the elementary school level, the teacher may start a sentence and ask a student to finish it. The oral recitation is followed by a period of instruction during which the teacher must face the problem of communicating in French with pupils who are learning French as a second language and who are basically Creole speakers. The use of French instead of Creole in the classroom has always been a problem in the Haitian educational system.

Students sit in groups of three or four on benches. If a student does not have a textbook, he/she may be allowed to share another student's book. In between courses students are allowed ten-minute breaks to prepare for the following class. During this time they usually study aloud. They have a regular half-hour playground break in the morning and in the afternoon.

Teachers use different methods of discipline. A trouble-making student may be asked to stand up, or kneel or go to the principal's office or copy a lesson two or three times in addition to the regular homework. Such students may even be asked to bring their parents to meet with the principal the following day. Discipline has not been a problem in classrooms in Haiti because students show the same deference and respect toward their teachers that they show toward their own parents.

The Learning Process

The learning process is partly derived from the nineteenth-century French educational model. In such a model, memorization is believed to be a key to learning. Students are required to memorize large sections of the textbooks assigned in their various courses, and their success or failure in class depends on this. Those who have developed a good memory are without doubt the most successful in school.

Students are tested through periodic oral exams where they are expected to recite word-for-word the lesson learned. The emphasis is placed on memorization rather than comprehension. In order to memorize a lesson for the following morning, a student may study at night under a *lamp tet gridap* (peasant lamp) or, if there is no electricity in the home, under a street lantern. The student must concentrate on a French text that he or she does not always understand, since it is a foreign language. (Only 2 percent of students enrolled in Haitian schools speak French at home). Often the textbook refers more to French culture than to the cultural history of Haiti. The dependence on French texts or on texts written by Haitians but following a French model is a difficult problem. These textbooks do not help the students develop their own Haitian identity but rather tend to alienate them from their homeland.

More than 75 percent of the students grow up in an environment dominated by uneducated and illiterate parents. In doing homework, they are either alone in the pursuit of their educational goals or they seek help from older brothers or sisters. Throughout their entire student life, children live in two almost unrelated worlds: their own environment and the one described in French textbooks.

From the *Ecoles Maternelles* to the *Baccalauréat 2ème Partie* the student is part of a process on which may depend the success of his aduit life. He may not realize the importance of schooling at the elementary level, but he will be aware of its importance and far-reaching outcome as he enters secondary school. All along the process, parents keep repeating to their children that given the precarious economy of the country, education is the only way out. Parents place less emphasis on their children's personal growth than on their success in school. One reason for this is that Haiti has no welfare system, and parents realize that the education of their children is the best investment they can make for their own future. Without the education necessary for a good job, it is unlikely that the children will be able to help their elderly parents.

There are very few schools where students are enrolled in classes according to their age levels. Most classes contain students of varying age groups. The rural background of many students, the *doubler* (repeat) process, the ability of established families, politicians, and other influential individuals to place their children and protégés in the schools

of their choice, are some of the factors which help explain this phenomenon.

At the end of a year, any student who fails to achieve a minimum grade point average is asked to repeat the class. The maximum grade is 10 and a student must pass with an average of 5 points in order to be promoted to another class the following year. Points are computed by averaging grades which appear in the bulletin given to students at the end of every month as well as grades on quarterly exams. The monthly bulletin or grade book is a record of written tests and oral recitation scores as well as points given for discipline in class. The process is similar in secondary schools except that if these students fail a June examination they are allowed a second chance to pass it. Re-take exams are scheduled in September or early in October. Students who have had tutors and have studied during the summer may be able to pass these exams and be promoted to another class.

Within the Haitian extended family, students pass on their books to their younger brothers, sisters, and cousins. They do the same with their notebooks, expecially if they have corrected arithmetic problems. Students who have the support of an older brother or sister usually have a lead over others in terms of their grades.

The greatest handicap of students in the Haitian school system is language: everything is done in French. Most students speak Creole at home and are not at ease in a school environment which requires that they memorize French material and write papers in French. Because it is not their native language, the amount of time in which students speak and deal with the French language is minimal. They do it only when they have to. For example, Creole continues to be spoken at home and during school recreation periods.

The distance to school is another area of much concern for Haitian parents, especially those living in the countryside. In cities like Port-au-Prince, students often have to walk two or three kilometers to school. In the countryside, some students walk five to ten kilometers to attend the village school. This situation creates a burden for both students and parents. Some students must leave their homes very early which means that often they go without breakfast. The possibility that such students will perform well in class is slim.

At home, few students are provided with basic material aids that might contribute to scholastic success. Earlier it was mentioned that students use the *lamp let gridap* or study in the streets under the public lanterns. Parents are often unable to provide their children with required textbooks, notebooks, pens, or pencils. Also, in the countryside, the work required at home is at times directly in conflict with schoolwork. For example, during the rainy season and the harvest time, students are expected to help their parents in the agricultural enterprise at the expense of their formal education.

Teacher-Student Relationships

In the Haitian school tradition, the teacher is like a father; this is most evident in the countryside. When children are in school, parents want them to be under the strict control of the teacher.

The student-teacher relationship develops in an asymmetric-subordinate pattern. The teacher is expected to know the truth and the student is expected to learn it from him or her. The submission of children to teachers is such that they hardly speak to their teachers unless they have to. There is, indeed, a social distance between the teacher and the student. The teacher is a *gran moun* (adult) and, as the saying goes, *gran moun pa joué ak timoun* (adults should not play with kids).

In the countryside, where the teacher usually knows the parents, whenever a student misbehaves the teacher will inform the parents and ask that some disciplinary action be taken at home. Student-teacher relationships are thus shaped by the Haitian socialization process in which respect and submission to adults are required from youngsters.

Parent-Student Relationships

As in the case of teacher-student relationships, parent-student relationships are distant and subordinate. The emphasis on discipline makes children fearful of their parents. This discipline consists mostly of pressuring children to study and do their homework and admonishing them for poor grades.

Hunger is one of the crucial problems Haitian students face. Because many families are very poor, children often arrive in school without having had a morning meal. Parents want their children to be educated, but these same families are unable to feed them breakfast. The research conducted by Jeliffe and Jeliffe[4] demonstrated that the caloric intake of Haitian school children has been insufficient.

Often, students who attend private schools where tuition and food are charged separately are denied meals because their parents are unable to pay the monthly fees on time. This happens at all levels of the Haitian school system, from the elementary school level in the countryside to the secondary school level in the city. It is a cause of much frustration and hardship for both children and parents.

Parent-Teacher Relationships

Parent-teacher relationships are informal. In the rural schools, parents and teachers know one another socially. Should a problem arise, they are free to visit each other's homes to discuss it. Parents seldom go to school to talk with teachers. The situation is a little different in Port-au-Prince. At certain times, parents may be asked to come to the school. For example, this may happen if parents are late in their payments or if a child is being expelled.

There are no parent organizations which could help shape policies concerning education. Parents hand over control of their children's education to the teachers who are supposed to be experts. Whatever happens in school, parents will side with the teachers against their children. They perceive their responsibility as that of making the youngsters study at home and be respectful toward their teachers in school.

Haitian Perception of Schooling

The Haitian perception of schooling is shaped by three factors: 1) job opportunities available to educated persons; 2) a negative view of manual labor; and 3) high esteem for education. During the colonial period, newly arrived Africans were forced to do plantation or domestic work. Since that time there has been a stigma attached to manual labor. It is perceived as "slave work" because it does not lead to upward social and economic mobility. Manual labor is seen as hard, humble, and dirty work, the plight of the uneducated person, and because it is associated with a

lack of formal schooling, education becomes the key to escape.

In contrast to the uneducated man who is forced to do manual labor, the educated man is seen as an office man, a white collar worker, one who gets good pay for light work. Education is seen as a way out of poverty and as a survival tool, a tool for upward economic and social mobility.

Rural people have an added reason for wanting their children to be educated. In general, these people are considered second rank citizens by city people. Many internalize this idea of inferiority and seek formal education so they can move to Port-au-Prince and identify themselves with the city people.

The prestige bestowed on anyone who has some formal education is another incentive for schooling. In any village or family, the educated are the ones to whom everyone turns. Education carries such prestige that educated individuals are not expected to do manual work and, if they cannot secure a non-manual job, they are expected to remain unemployed. There is also a certain status associated with being an *écolier* (pupil) or *étudiant* (student) and wearing the uniform of a particular school. Those who are able to speak French have even more prestige.

There are two factors which motivate parents to send their children to school. First, because of the emphasis placed on formal education, families which do not send their children to school come under heavy criticism from neighbors and friends. Second, schooling is seen as an investment in social capital, a guarantee that children will later be able to take care of themselves and their parents. These are some of the elements which place the perception of schooling in its proper sociological context.

Conclusion

The chief problems in the Haitian educational system have their roots in the ideological orientation of Haitian society. The transformation of Haiti from a colonial state to a nation state since its independence from France in 1804 has not included a separation from French influence on the matrix of Haitian social structure. The French educational system has continued to be the model for the Haitian educational system, with the result that the Haitian elite are very dependent on France.

Such a policy of imitation creates a society in which the educated are more knowledgeable about things French than about the Haitian reality. It also creates a post colonial mentality in which anything foreign is considered superior to anything local. Rather than transmitting national values which would help integrate Haitian students into the mainstream of Haitian society, the school transmits foreign values which ultimately integrate the masses of students into the local elite subculture.

Notes

1. Linda Seligman, "Haitians: A Neglected Minority," *The Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 55 (1977): 409-411.
2. *Institut Haïtien de Statistiques, Bulletin no. 22* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de l'Etat, 1956), p. 7. Trans. by M.S.L.
3. Marie Thérèse Colimon, "Plaidoyer pour l'école maternelle populaire," *Conjonction, Revue Franco-Haïtienne*, no. 133 (1977): 5-28.
4. Mercer Cook, *Education in Haiti* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1948), pp. 52-53.
5. George A. Dale, *Education in the Republic of Haiti* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1959). p. 72.
6. D.B. Jeliffe and E.F.P. Jeliffe, "The Nutritional Status of Haitian Children," *Acta Tropica* 18 (1961): 1-45.

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